



OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE EXAM SCHOOLS ADMISSIONS TASK FORCE

March 16, 2021

The Boston School Committee's Exam Schools Admissions Task Force held a remote meeting on March 16, 2021 at 5 p.m. on Zoom. For more information about any of the items listed below, visit <https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/esataskforce>, email feedback@bostonpublicschools.org or call the Boston School Committee Office at (617) 635-9014.

ATTENDANCE

Exam Schools Admissions Task Force Members Present: Co-Chair Michael Contompasis; Co-Chair Tanisha Sullivan; Samuel Acevedo; Matt Cregor; Tanya Freeman-Wisdom; Katherine Grassa; Zena Lum; Zoe Nagasawa; Rachel Skerritt; Rosann Tung; and Tamara Waite.

Exam Schools Admissions Task Force Member Absent: Acacia Aguirre.

BPS Staff Present: Monica Roberts, Chief of Student, Family and Community Advancement; and Monica Hogan, Senior Executive Director of the Office of Data and Accountability.

DOCUMENTS PRESENTED

[Agenda](#)

[Meeting Minutes: March 10, 2021](#)

[Presentation: Selective School Admissions: Options for Diversity](#)

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Parvex called the roll. Ms. Aguirre was absent. Mr. Acevedo joined the meeting less than a minute after roll call. Dr. Tanya Freeman-Wisdom joined the meeting five minutes late. All other members were present.

Mr. Contompasis called the meeting to order. He announced that simultaneous interpretation services were available in Spanish, Haitian Creole, Cabo Verdean, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin, Portuguese, Somali, Arabic, and American Sign Language (ASL); the interpreters introduced themselves and gave instructions in their native language on how to access simultaneous interpretation by changing the Zoom channel.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: MARCH 10, 2021

Approved – The Task Force unanimously approved the minutes of the March 10, 2021 Exam Schools Admissions Task Force meeting.

PRESENTATION

Mr. Contompasis introduced and thanked the presenter of the evening, Dr. Sean P. Corcoran, Associate Professor of Public Policy and Education at Peabody College, Vanderbilt University. Dr. Corcoran is the author of a study of specialized high school admissions in New York City (NYC) called "Pathways to an Elite Education: Application, Admission, and Matriculation to New York City's Specialized High Schools."

Dr. Corcoran's presentation was "Selective School admissions: Options for diversity". He provided background on the different rationales for why selective admissions high schools exist. He presented the different criterias used for admission, and types of admissions priorities. He explained how the choice of admission criteria related to diversity and representation and gave the example of screened and specialized high schools in NYC, exam schools in Boston and specialized schools in Chicago. He closed the presentation by connecting each of the admissions criteria to diversity goals and discussed the pros and cons of each of the criterias.

Ms. Sullivan invited the members to ask questions. Ms. Skerritt asked about the holistic method for admissions and if there were large districts that had subjective admissions at a district level. Dr. Corcoran answered that all the holistic methods for admission he knew were school-based and not district-based. Mr. Acevedo wanted to know what the community process looked like in Chicago prior to their admission reforms. Dr. Corcoran referred to a report from the Century Foundation that could help; Mr. Cregor mentioned that the Task Force was reaching out to the Century Foundation to get more information about different schools. Ms. Tung asked if there are certain types of tests that are used which result in meeting more diversity criteria, and if there were any districts not using tests for their selective high schools. Dr. Corcoran responded that he couldn't think of any schools without tests, adding that based on his simulation, there would be a better outcome switching to a statewide assessment rather than voluntary tests. He added that he favors taking out the voluntary piece in test taking. Ms. Grassa asked about alternative ways to assess students without having a disadvantage or advantage for specific students. Dr. Corcoran said many schools in NYC used alternative ways but as it is a more decentralized system it's harder to see the underlying data that goes into admission decisions. Ms. Lum asked if there was any merit in looking into what went into the pipeline for admissions. Dr. Corcoran acknowledged that it was an important piece and spoke about the importance of having opportunities available to all students at an early age.

Mr. Contompasis asked if Chicago's tier system had resulted in a satisfactory approach. Dr. Corcoran said he didn't think there had been many changes in the tier categorizing and that they must be satisfied. Ms. Nagasawa asked regarding a comment that Chicago could increase diversity without reducing selectivity with minor tweaks. She wanted to know what these minor tweaks would be. Dr. Cocoran explained that the biggest changes were using students' individual backgrounds. He explained some of the factors that could work against the tier system, such as gentrification. Ms. Tung asked if he knew other districts using MAP assessment and what the results were. Ms. Hogan responded that Chicago, Nashville, and Kansas City all used the MAP assessment.

Ms. Sullivan asked if BPS was going to work with NWEA to design an assessment that was aligned with the BPS curriculum. Ms. Hogan answered that it was not specifically designed for Boston but it was a computer adaptive test. Ms. Grassa said that the test is aligned with the state standards taught in BPS, not the curriculum. She also added that it was used for performative assessment purposes. Ms. Sullivan said most districts had either a standardized test or some other form of assessment to establish academic fit.

Mr. Contompasis thanked Dr. Corcoran for his presentation and recommended a research paper that could be of interest to the Task Force: *Racial Diversity and Measuring Merit: Evidence from Boston's Exam School Admissions* by Rucinski, M., & Goodman, J. (forthcoming).

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

- Sharon Hinton, Hyde Park parent and educator, testified regarding the court hearing, outreach for community engagement and student voice.
- Somy Kim, Mattapan parent, Mildred K-8 and Boston Latin Academy, testified in favor of the zip code criteria in the admission process.
- Edith Bazile, Dorchester parent, testified in favor of changing the admission process.
- Darragh Murphy, Dorchester resident and community advocate, testified against the zip code criteria for admission.
- Sarah Zaphiris, West Roxbury parent, testified in favor of the MAP test.
- Sarah Grandfield, West Roxbury resident and BPS alumna, testified against the zip code criteria for admission.
- Domingos Darosa, Hyde Park resident and BPS alumni, testified regarding quality education for all students and in favor of a hybrid system for admission.
- Joy McDonald, parent, testified against the zip code criteria and in favor of a transparent admissions policy.
- Nancy Minucci, South Boston resident and BPS graduate, testified regarding her frustration with the process.
- Jess Madden-Fuoco, Hyde Park resident, Hernandez parent, and English High Instructional Transformation Coach, testified in support of changing the admission process.
- Elaine Conroy, West Roxbury parent, testified against the zip code code criteria and in

favor of quality education for all.

- Phuong Nguyen, Dorchester parent, testified against the zip code code criteria.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Ms. Sullivan asked the members to give final comments. Mr. Acevedo encouraged people testifying to provide written testimony. Ms. Skerrit asked the Task Force to consider the challenges of being in the second year of the pandemic. Ms. Tung requested that members obtain the two articles that were mentioned by Dr. Corcoran. Ms. Lum wanted to know if the Chicago and NYC schools indicated that the test discrepancies were not as large as in Boston and if those factors would be considered for the members.

Ms. Sullivan reminded the members that they were going to have experts and speakers talk about selective admission processes in other parts of the country. She said that after listening to the community, she was concerned about the incorrect information that might be out in the community regarding the current exam schools admissions policy. She encouraged BPS to clarify information about the temporary policy. She expressed concern that misinformation would divide the community and pit one racial group against each other, and she emphasized the importance in educating the community in the temporary process. She repeated that her goal as the co-chair is not to allow divisiveness to take hold in Boston.

Mr. Contompasis said he was disturbed there might be confusion about the recommendations. He believed that whatever recommendations they come up with, that the community should be aware of the recommendations before they are presented to the School Committee. Ms. Sullivan encouraged the community to use the public comment period to give constructive policy recommendations to the Task Force. Referring to one public speaker, Mr. Contompais said that it wasn't the role of the Task Force to give an update about the pending court case. Ms. Sullivan agreed and reminded the public that the charge of the Task Force was specifically related to drafting a new, permanent admissions policy. Mr. Acevedo suggested the creation of a fact sheet about the nature of their work which would clarify the facts. Ms. Sullivan thanked the presenter, public, and interpreters.

ADJOURN

At approximately 7:10 p.m., the Committee voted unanimously, by roll call, to adjourn the meeting.

Attest:



Lena Parvex
Administrative Assistant